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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH PARLIAMENT PASSES NSC REFORM PACKAGE

REF: A. ANKARA 4804

[B](#). ANKARA 4544

(U) Classified by Acting Political Counselor Nicholas S.
Kass. Reason: 1.5 (b)(d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Parliament late July 30 unanimously approved the AK Government's seventh EU-related reform package. As noted in refelts, the most important -- and controversial -- aspects of the package concerned changes to the National Security Council (NSC). Though limited in scope, the NSC reforms -- if enacted and implemented -- are a positive step toward increasing elected civilian authority in Turkey. End summary.

The Package

[1](#)2. (C) The law includes the following provisions: 1) the NSC SecGen will be assigned by the prime minister with the approval of the president, and will report to a Deputy P.M. rather than directly to the P.M. -- a move widely understood as diminishing the SecGen's political status; 2) the NSC shall meet every two months, or at the discretion of the prime minister or president; and 3) making the NSC agenda and procedures/guidelines less formally peremptory. In addition to these changes, the package also contained reforms designed to ease restrictions on freedom of expression and expedite torture cases in the courts. The final version does not, however, bring military spending under Parliamentary supervision, as AK had initially wanted. Instead, the expenditures of all "public and private institutions" will be subject to review by the Court of Accounts (Sayistay). The package pointedly notes that "the supervision of the assets of the Armed Forces will be made in line with the principle of secrecy as required by the national defense services," which in practice will severely limit civilian governmental/parliamentary oversight of the military. Moreover, the presidency will also remain exempt from Sayistay review.

Support from Both Sides of the Aisle

[1](#)3. (U) During the debate on the floor, former Foreign Minister and AK deputy Yasar Yakis stressed that the latest reforms are "only one phase of harmonization with EU regulations" and that the GOT's efforts will continue. Justice Minister and Government Spokesman Cemil Cicek added that "Turkey has taken an important step on the way to joining the EU and toward more healthy democracy and more open society." Although opposition CHP leader Baykal had expressed publicly some reservations about the need for further reform, all CHP deputies apparently endorsed the package. M.P. and Deputy Group Chairman Ozyurek stated that his party supported the laws not to gain entry into the EU, but for the benefit of the Turkish people. Retired Ambassador and CHP deputy Onur Oymen cautioned the GOT not to pursue, as part of the EU-related packages, reforms beyond the scope of what was required by the EU. Oymen pointed out that holding NSC meetings every two months, for example, was not part of the Copenhagen criteria.

Back-Stage Views

[1](#)4. (C) Privately to us just after the vote, comments by senior and other prominent AK M.P.s -- including party Vice Chairman Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat (Mersin), the ethnically Kurdish de facto Number Two in the Party organization and director of AK's outreach to the Kurds; Human Rights

Commission member Ersonmez Yarbay (Ankara); Eyyup Sanay (Ankara), an AK founding member and Foreign Affairs Commission Spokesman; and Zulfukar Izol (Sanliurfa), scion of a leading Kurdish tribe -- ranged from modest pleasure to mild disappointment with what they regarded as a diluted final package. Yarbay explained that the time simply was "not right" to push comprehensive steps to redress civilian-military relations; he noted that the Government is contemplating when/how to put on its agenda more wide-ranging measures, including the related issues of budgeting and corruption in the military. In this regard, Istanbul AK M.P. Mehmet Denizolgun, whose family heads the wealthy and politically influential Suleymanci tarikat (nominally illegal sufi order), offered to us privately on July 31 that the upcoming meeting of the Supreme Military Council (YAS) will be critical in determining whether moderate TGS Chief Ozkok can push aside the hard-liners in the senior ranks who have been resisting reform.

15. (C) CHP M.P. Bulent Tanla, who is close to Party chief Deniz Baykal, sounded a more positive note. The reforms are a very positive step that should be viewed favorably by the EU, he told us July 31. However, Necdet Budak, a CHP M.P. from Edirne who is a strong supporter of Kemal Dervis's calls for intraparty reform, took a more cautious stance. Implementation will be "extremely important" in determining whether the laws will have any effect, he said. "There is an entrenched system, and whether the changes will be accepted by that system remains to be seen."

Comment

16. (C) Though the reforms are limited in scope and received unanimity support in the Parliament, it is an open question whether President Sezer, who has 15 days to deliberate, will approve the law. Sezer's track record is characterized by repeated efforts to obstruct and delay the AK reform program in the interest of the status quo; he vetoed AK's sixth EU package, dealing in part with reforms to stringent anti-terror laws, despite unanimous support from both sides of the aisle.

17. (C) The NSC reforms -- if enacted and implemented -- are a positive step toward increasing elected civilian authority in Turkey, although AK did not get everything it wanted, particularly in the crucial area of military budget oversight. Moreover, as reported reftels, Erdogan is trying to avoid confrontation with the TGS before the YAS, and is particularly interested in making it easier on Ozkok, who in recent weeks has been under considerable pressure from military hard-liners. Such restraint can be laudable, given the potential for overreaction from Establishment circles. Nevertheless, it carries with it an inherent risk of undermining reform momentum and preserving hard-line equities in NSC-related and other matters.

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